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# Intergenerational Transmission of Volunteering

René Bekkers

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**abstract:** In this article, I investigate the strength of intergenerational transmission of volunteering for non-profit associations in The Netherlands. Data from the Family Survey of the Dutch Population 2000 reveal that there are significant relations between current volunteering and parental volunteering in the past. While the transmission of volunteering for religious and quasi-religious ('pillarized') associations is due largely to the transmission of religion and social status from parents to their children, parental volunteering for pillarized associations has increased the likelihood of children's volunteering for secular associations, even controlling for parental and children's religion, education, wealth and personality characteristics. Consistent with a value internalization explanation, this spillover effect was not due to the direct social pressure of parents.

**keywords:** Learning theory ♦ personality ♦ socialization ♦ voluntary associations

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## Introduction

Parents are expected to take responsibility for bringing up their children as good citizens. Creating a sense of civic identity in children is an important aspect of good citizenship (Yates and Youniss, 1998). One of the roles that a good citizen can assume, reflecting a well-established civic identity, is that of a volunteer. Volunteering for non-profit organizations benefits the community at large – besides providing private benefits such as social skills, friendships and other social contacts. What can parents do to promote their children's volunteering? In this article I discuss three strategies that parents can use. First, they can set an example by volunteering themselves. Second, parents can provide their children with the social status and skills that facilitate volunteering. Third, parents can integrate their children in well-connected communities that share the responsibility for creating a sense of civic identity in children by creating opportunities for participation in community life.

There are signs that each of these strategies is currently under stress. There is increasing concern about the disintegration of community life in Western societies (Putnam, 2000). Increasing numbers of families living in poverty, especially single-parent families (Vrooman et al., 2005: 22–3) endanger the development of civic identity. Non-profit organizations in The Netherlands, where the current study was conducted, report increasing difficulties in finding new volunteers (Devilee, 2005). While the number of hours that parents work for pay on the labour market continues to increase (Schor, 1992; Peters, 2000), volunteer work is under pressure. In this article, I attempt to estimate the influence of each of the three strategies available to parents on their children's volunteering. First, I discuss theories that explain why these strategies are effective in promoting civic identity among children.

## Theory

### *Direct transmission models*

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) may explain why volunteering is transmitted from parents to children (Janoski and Wilson, 1995). The theory suggests that parents can enhance their children's prosocial behaviour by modelling prosocial behaviour. Thus, parents can promote children's volunteering by volunteering themselves. Volunteers endorse this theory: children of parents who volunteer often refer to the example of their parents as a reason for their volunteering (Independent Sector, 1999). The 'modelling effect' of parental volunteering on children's volunteering is the core characteristic of direct transmission models. I distinguish between two different direct transmission models, based on the arguments about why modelling works: (1) parents reward their children's prosocial behaviour with approval; (2) parents instill a set of general prosocial values.

*Approval.* Parents often reward their children for prosocial or other socially desirable behaviour with expressions of approval and react with disapproval of failure to show prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1994). Children imitate the model's prosocial behaviour in order to receive approval from the model or from other persons. When the dominant motive to conform to social norms remains the need for social approval and does not 'evolve' to some internalized value, children will not display prosocial behaviour when the parents are not around and there are no other persons who may reward it with approval. Approval has powerful effects when parents are around, but has limited or no effect when they are not. Consider the example of a father occupying an important role in a local community organization (Fletcher et al., 2000), who eliminates for his children the option to refuse to participate in the activities of the organization. It is doubtful whether such strong forms of parental influence have an enduring positive effect on children's civic engagement. According to the approval explanation, children will be more likely to follow their parent's example only when their parents can give approval. If the approval explanation is correct, parental volunteering promotes children's volunteering more strongly when parents have more contacts with children (hypothesis 1).

*Value internalization.* Value internalization is defined as 'the development of children of the ability to regulate their own behaviour, with little external monitoring or sanctioning, with respect to a set of self-accepted prosocial values' (Maccoby and Martin, 1983: 51). Parents who volunteer teach their children with deeds that volunteering is doing good in society. Volunteering requires giving up some leisure time in order to help an association reach its goals. Children who see their parents volunteer become accustomed to the idea that personal sacrifice for some greater good has intrinsic value. To the extent that children internalize prosocial values, they will be more likely to engage in volunteering behaviour when they grow up. The more general this internalized value, the greater the likelihood that they are active as a volunteer for an association that is different from the specific type of association in which their parents participated. For instance, children of parents who were active in a political party or the church choir may volunteer for a homeless shelter or for an environmental lobby group. When modelling effectively results in a general willingness to volunteer, there will be a spillover from one type of volunteering to another. A successful internalization of prosocial values will not only lead to volunteering for the type of association that parents were active in, but also to volunteering for other associations. If it is the internalization of prosocial values that causes parental volunteering to affect children's volunteering, we should find that parental volunteering promotes children's volunteering for all types of association, not just the one that the parents were volunteering for (hypothesis 2).

While there is no empirical study revealing a causal chain from parental volunteering to children's volunteering through internalized prosocial values, there is evidence for pieces of the chain. In a cross-national cross-sectional study, it has been found that parental emphasis on civic responsibility is positively related to civic engagement by adolescents (Flanagan et al., 1998). Uslaner (2002) found that children of volunteers are more likely to have trust in other people than are the children of non-volunteers, controlling for parental characteristics such as religion and education. Beutel and Kirkpatrick Johnson (2004) showed that current parental volunteering promotes children's prosocial values, but they did not control for other parental characteristics.

There are three problems with the evidence on modelling effects. The first is that there are no studies available actually showing that parental prosocial behaviour in childhood has enduring effects on prosocial behaviour by their children in adulthood. The 'lasting effects on helping and donating' reported in the developmental psychology literature are limited to behaviours 'some weeks after the experimental modelling' (Grusec and Lytton, 1988: 183). In a review of the literature on 'positive citizenship', Zaff and Michelsen (2001) found 'no experimental or longitudinal research that examines parental influences'.

The second problem is that the examples of prosocial behaviour investigated in developmental psychology typically involve small sacrifices in particular situations (Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983: 47; Clary and Miller, 1986: 1359), such as giving some change to a particular orphan's fund. There are very few studies concerning sustained altruism covering a longer time-span. A recent study of the transmission of generosity to charitable causes in the USA (Wilhelm et al., 2005) has provided evidence that concurrent parental and children's generosity are moderately correlated, but in this study no data were available on parental behaviour in the past. One of the few prospective studies of volunteering available, that of Rosenthal et al. (1998), does not give information about parental volunteering in the past either.

A third problem is that a positive correlation between parental and children's volunteering does not tell us much. It could very well be that the correlation is spurious. Volunteering is strongly related to religious involvement as well as the level of education, both in the USA (Wilson, 2000; Independent Sector, 2002) and in The Netherlands (Bekkers, 2004, 2005). Because parents transmit religion (Need and De Graaf, 1996; Myers, 1996) as well as education (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Ganzeboom et al., 1991) to their children, it may be that the apparent transmission of volunteering is due to the transmission of religion and education. Any study lacking the level of education and religious involvement as control variables (e.g. Kasser et al., 1995) yields biased results. I also study a third set of characteristics that parents pass on to their children: personality characteristics. Previous research has shown that individual differences in empathy and extraversion are related to volunteering (Smith, 1966; Penner, 2002; Bekkers, 2005).

### *Indirect transmission models*

*Social status.* A different account of why parental volunteering affects children's volunteering is provided by the status transmission model, which has its roots in Weberian theory (Janoski and Wilson, 1995). Volunteering for non-profit organizations is more common in higher socio-economic status groups, because socio-economic status provides resources and interests that facilitate participation (Wilson and Musick, 1998; Wilson, 2000). Because parents pass on social status to their children (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Ganzeboom et al., 1991), and status promotes volunteering, the relationship between parental and children's volunteering may be due to the transmission of socio-economic status rather than to a 'modelling effect' (Smith and Baldwin, 1974; Glass et al., 1986). Figure 1 indicates how parental socio-economic status could be the underlying variable in parent-child similarity in volunteering. Parental volunteering is the

result of level of social status (arrow A). Parents transfer their status to their children (arrow B). Among children, volunteering is also related to social status (arrow C). As a result, there is no direct or indirect influence of parental volunteering on children's volunteering. The bivariate correlation between parental volunteering and children's volunteering is spurious. This is indicated with a dotted line for arrow D in Figure 1.

The indirect status transmission model predicts that the correlation between parental and children's volunteering is (partly) a by-product of the intergenerational transmission of social status. We therefore assume that parental volunteer work has a smaller impact on children's volunteering when controlling for transmission of social status (hypothesis 3).

In a study of female volunteers in the United States, Mustillo et al. (2004) found support for the status transmission model. In a United States study of male and female volunteers, Janoski and Wilson (1995) found support for the direct transmission model only in the analysis of community organizations.

*Religion.* Church attendance is one of the key factors promoting volunteering (Putnam, 2000; Bekkers, 2005). Putnam (2000: 67) states that 'religiosity rivals education as a powerful correlate of most forms of civic engagement'. Volunteering is more common in religious groups, the more cohesive, the smaller and more conservative they are. Consequently, the non-religious show the lowest rates of volunteering; slightly higher levels are found among Catholics; Reformed Protestants have even higher rates of volunteering, while the highest rates of all are found among Re-reformed Protestants ('gereformeerden') (Bekkers and Schuyt, 2007). Because parents pass on their religion to their children (Need and De Graaf, 1996; Myers, 1996), it can be expected that omitting parental religion leads to biased estimates of the influence of parental volunteering. Surprisingly, previous studies of intergenerational transmission of volunteering have focused on social status and have rarely given much attention to religion. The indirect religion transmission model thus predicts that parental volunteer work has a smaller impact on children's volunteering when controlling for transmission of religion (hypothesis 4).

*Personality.* A third indirect transmission model follows from personality psychology. Parents pass on not just their religion and social status to their children, but also their personality characteristics. Research on volunteering has shown that volunteering behaviour is indeed

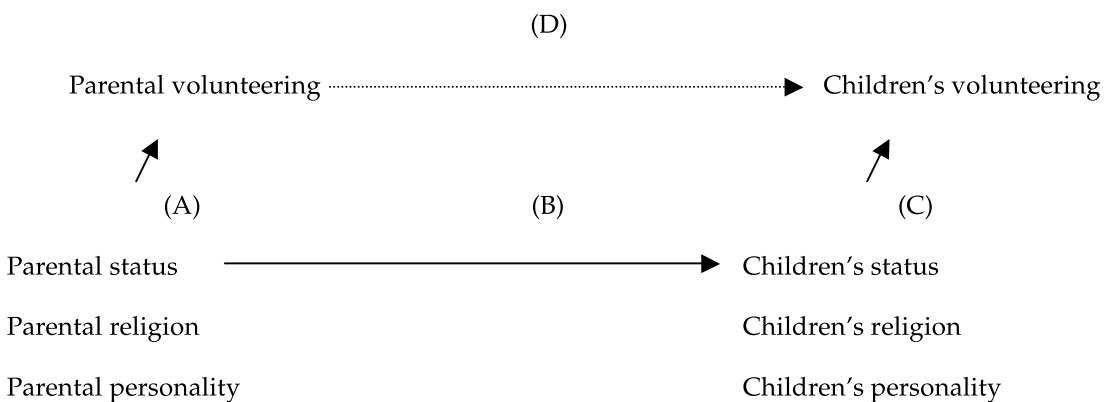


Figure 1 Indirect transmission models of volunteering

dependent on personality characteristics, most notably extraversion (Smith, 1966; Bekkers and De Graaf, 2002; Bekkers, 2005) and empathy (Penner, 2002; Bekkers, 2005). Studies on behavioural genetics report heritability estimates of up to 0.70 for empathy (Zuckerman, 1991: 99–100; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992; Davis et al., 1994) and 0.40 to 0.60 for extraversion (Zuckerman, 1991; Plomin et al., 1997; Borkenau et al., 2001). Thus, personality characteristics, too, may be important control variables. The indirect personality transmission model predicts that parental volunteer work has a smaller impact on children's volunteering when controlling for personality characteristics (hypothesis 5).

### ***The Dutch case***

The present study investigates the transmission of volunteering in The Netherlands. The Netherlands is an interesting test case for theories on volunteering because of the mixture of religious and non-religious organizations in civil society. An important proportion of all volunteering in The Netherlands takes place in churches or non-profit organizations with a specific religious identity (De Hart, 1999). During the first half of the twentieth century, most of the voluntary associations in The Netherlands had some direct or indirect relation to organized religion: Catholics and protestants had their own soccer clubs, workers' unions, women's organizations, and so on. This religious cleavage was so strong that even those who did not belong to a church were forced to join associations that explicitly rejected a religious identity. In Lijphart's (1975) terms, Dutch civil society was 'pillarized' (Lijphart, 1975; Verba et al., 1978) because the social and political structure of Dutch society resembled a temple, with the roof based on separate pillars. Social interaction for the majority of the population took place almost exclusively within one's own religious group. However, at the top, the political elites of different groups did have contacts with each other and settled political disputes. Before World War II, few voluntary associations were able to avoid the forces of pillarization.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Dutch civil society changed profoundly. Pillarized associations suffered large membership losses. The total number of memberships did not decline due to the emergence of many secular associations, such as environmental organizations and associations defending animal or human rights, which would have compensated for the decline among religious and pillarized associations (De Hart, 1999; Bekkers and De Graaf, 2002).

The presence of religious, pillarized and secular voluntary associations in Dutch civil society leads to hypotheses on the differential effects of religious and status transmission. Social status is more strongly related to participation in secular organizations (Bekkers and De Graaf, 2002) than to participation in religious and pillarized organizations. Obviously, the converse holds for the relation of religious involvement with volunteering in secular versus religious and pillarized organizations. Therefore, it can be assumed that introducing parental education mainly weakens the relation between parental and children's secular volunteering, while introducing parental religion weakens the relation between parental and children's religious and pillarized volunteering.

## **Data and methods**

### ***Data***

The third edition of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population is used to test the hypotheses (De Graaf et al., 2000). In this nationwide survey, a two-stage stratified sample of individuals in households was used. In the first stage, a random sample of municipalities in The Netherlands was drawn, stratified according to urbanization level. In the second stage, a sample of persons was drawn from the population registers of these municipalities. In total, 864 persons agreed to participate. Of these primary respondents, 723 partners also participated in the



study. The overall response rate was 40.6 per cent, which is not unusual for personal interviews in The Netherlands. The respondents completed a computer-assisted personal interview as well as a write-in questionnaire.

## Measures

*Volunteering activities.* The dependent variable of the analysis is the volunteering behaviour of the respondents. In the personal interview, the interviewer mentioned 10 types of voluntary association, and asked for each type whether the respondents were members, and, if so, whether they volunteered on a regular basis. The resulting 10 volunteering variables were re-coded in 4 categories: no volunteering, religious volunteering, volunteering for pillarized organizations and volunteering for secular organizations. Respondents who reported volunteering for church were categorized as religious volunteers. The following were considered as pillarized organizations: political parties, women's organizations, workers' unions and schools. The other organization types (hobby clubs, sports clubs, environmental organizations, organizations defending consumers' interests, neighbourhood community organizations, musical and theatre groups, and other social groups) were considered as secular because they are not based on a specific religious identity, except in rare cases. Respondents reporting volunteering activities for religious as well as another type of association were considered as religious volunteers. Respondents volunteering for both pillarized and secular organizations were considered as pillarized volunteers.

*Parental volunteering.* A measure of parental volunteering was constructed from several different questions. In the series of questions on parents' religion, the respondents recalled whether their parents were involved as volunteers in church activities when the respondents were 15 years of age. In a series of questions on parental political involvement, respondents recalled whether their parents were involved as volunteers for a political party. Finally, the respondents recalled whether their father and/or mother were active as volunteers for any other association (school, youth organization, etc.). First, all volunteering activities reported for mothers and fathers were summed into measures of parental volunteering. Volunteering for the church by either the mother or the father was labelled as religious volunteering. All other volunteering activities by parents (for a political party, a workers' union, in school or other organization) were coded as parental pillarized volunteering. Almost half of the respondents ( $n = 688$ , 49.8 per cent) indicated that their parents were not engaged in volunteering activities; 24.5 per cent indicated volunteering activities by their parents for church ( $n = 338$ ); 25.7 per cent recalled volunteering activities by their parents for pillarized organizations only ( $n = 355$ ). Parents who volunteered for church as well as other organizations were considered as religious volunteers.

*Religion and social status.* In a series of questions on religious socialization, respondents recalled whether their parents were church members at the time they grew up, and, if so, to which denomination they belonged, how often they attended church (five categories, ranging from 'never' to at least once a week), and whether praying at dinner and/or reading the bible was customary when they were 15 years of age. A factor analysis on the responses to these questions revealed one strong factor (eigenvalue 3.90, explaining 65 per cent of the variance), which was saved as a 'religious socialization' composite score. This score can be interpreted as an indicator of the intensity of parental religion. In addition, children recalled their parents' religious affiliation. Most respondents had two Catholic parents ( $n = 656$ , 41.3 per cent). This category served as the reference category in the analyses. Parents who did not have a religious affiliation or who had different affiliations were put in one category ( $n = 556$ , 35.0 per cent). Other



categories were Reformed parents ( $n = 182$ , 11.5 per cent), Re-reformed parents ( $n = 144$ , 9.1 per cent) and parents belonging to other religions ( $n = 49$ , 3.1 per cent). Respondents also reported their present religious affiliation and frequency of church attendance in questions formatted in similar fashion to the questions on parental religion.

A composite measure of parental social status was obtained from a factor analysis of the father's occupational status, the mean level of education of both parents, and the number of luxury articles in the parental home, all at age 15. The father's and mother's levels of education were measured in five categories, ranging from lower education to a university degree. Because the father's and mother's levels of education were strongly correlated ( $r = 0.58$ ) the mean level of education of both parents was used as a measure of parental education. Fathers' occupational status was measured using the socio-economic index (SEI) procedure (Ganzeboom et al., 1992). Parental wealth was measured with a list of seven luxury articles (such as a car, dishwasher, VCR, etc.), of which the respondents recalled whether they were present in the parental home when they were 15 years of age. The sum of the number of articles present in the parental home proved to be a sufficiently reliable scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ) and served as an indicator of parental wealth. To reduce the number of variables in the analyses, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to investigate whether the correlations among parental wealth, the mean level of education of parents and fathers' occupational status were strong enough to combine them into a composite score of parental social status. Indeed, the factor analysis revealed one factor (eigenvalue 1.80, explaining 60 per cent of the variance). Factor scores were saved as a new variable labelled parental social status. For the respondents, separate measures of the level of education (measured in eight categories, ranging from primary school to post-academic degree), household income (sum of all sources of income of both partners in the household) and occupational status (SEI score) are included.

*Personality characteristics.* Seven personality characteristics were measured with commonly used instruments: empathy and perspective-taking with items from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1994) and the 'Big Five' with an adjective checklist (Hofstee et al., 1992). Empathy was measured with six items describing emotional involvement with other people's misfortune, each ranging from 1: 'does not fit me at all' to 5: 'fits me completely' (sample item: 'I often feel concerned for less fortunate people'; for a description of all items, see Davis, 1994). Factor analysis showed that two of the original items had low communalities. With only four items, the reliability of the scale was adequate ( $\alpha = 0.68$ ). Perspective-taking was measured by the sum of six items, also ranging from 1 to 5, describing the tendency to take the perspective of other persons (sample item: 'When I am angry with someone, I try to take his or her perspective', see Davis, 1994). The perspective-taking scale measured the cognitive aspect of empathy and had an  $\alpha$  of 0.78.

The write-in questionnaire contained a 'Big 5' adjective checklist, with 30 adjectives describing personal characteristics. The items were a selection from a Dutch translation of the 100 Big Five markers developed by Goldberg (1992). Respondents were asked to what degree these adjectives applied to themselves on a scale of 1 ('Does not fit me at all') to 7 ('Fits me completely'). Factor analysis clearly showed the hypothesized five-factor structure. Mean scores were computed for all dimensions: extraversion ( $\alpha = 0.82$ , four items), neuroticism ( $\alpha = 0.77$ , four items), agreeableness ( $\alpha = 0.83$ , six items), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = 0.87$ , four items), and openness ( $\alpha = 0.80$ , six items). To facilitate the interpretation of results, all personality variables were z-standardized. Although the hypotheses of the present article only involved extraversion, because this trait is most often reported to be related to volunteering, the other four traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness) are also included for exploratory purposes.

*Distance to parents.* According to the approval hypothesis (H1), the effect of parental volunteering on children's volunteering will be limited to those children who are still in contact with their parents, or who still reside in a social network with the same social norms as in their childhood. If the effect of parental volunteering on children's volunteering is equally strong for those who have limited contact with their parents, who became non-religious, or moved away, it is unlikely that social approval is the mechanism responsible. To test this hypothesis, an index was constructed to measure the distance to parents. Respondents who had lost at least one of their parents, who had moved more than once in their lives, and who had left the church in which they were brought up received the highest score on this index (3;  $n = 156$ , 10.0 per cent), while respondents whose parents were both still alive, who did not move more than once and still belonged to the same religion as their parents received the lowest score (0;  $n = 237$ , 15.2 per cent). The other respondents differed from their parents in one ( $n = 577$ , 37.0 per cent) or two respects ( $n = 590$ , 37.8 per cent). To facilitate interpretation of the interactions with parental volunteering, the respondents were placed in a low-distance group when the distance index was 0 or 1, and in a high-distance group when the index had a value of 2 or 3. In order to compare the effects of the independent variables with different measurement scales, all variables in the analysis (except dummy variables) were z-standardized.

## Methods

A multinomial logistic regression of volunteering activities was conducted to test the hypotheses. This statistical analysis technique is suited to model choices between several categories of mutually exclusive alternatives when the alternatives are qualitatively different (Cramer, 1991). In our case, the decision is on whether to volunteer or not, and, if so, for what kind of association(s). Individuals may choose to volunteer for church, for pillarized organizations or for secular organizations, or may not volunteer at all. The multinomial logistic analysis produces results that closely resemble those of an ordinary logistic regression analysis. The analysis can be understood as a series of three simultaneous logistic analyses comparing the three types of volunteering activity with no volunteering (which is the reference category). For each independent variable, three odds ratios are given: one for the decision to volunteer for a pillarized association (versus no volunteering), one for the decision to volunteer for a secular association, and one for the decision to volunteer for both types of organization.

The analysis proceeds in six steps. In a first model, parental volunteering, age, gender and children's personality characteristics are included. In a second model, parental religion is controlled, introducing parental religious affiliation and the level of religious involvement, represented by the religious socialization factor score. In a third model, own religion is controlled (own affiliation and church attendance). If the indirect religious transmission model is correct, the effects of parental volunteering should disappear in model 2, while in model 3 the effect of parental religion should be mediated by own religious involvement. The same logic underlies the introduction of parental social status in model 4 and own status in model 5. In a final model, interactions of parental volunteering with the distance to parents' index are included to test the approval hypothesis.

## Results

### *Parent-child similarity in volunteering*

First, the bivariate relationships of parental volunteering with children's volunteering are reported in Table 1.

Among the adult respondents who reported that their parents did not volunteer for a religious organization when they were 15 years of age, only 2.2 per cent volunteered for religious associations (see column 1). Among those who reported volunteering activities for

**Table 1** Intergenerational transmission of volunteering for non-profit organizations in The Netherlands (source: Family Survey of the Dutch Population, 2000)

Parental volunteering	Children's current volunteering			n
	Religious	Pillarized	Secular	
No (or different)	2.2%	5.0%	15.7%	668
Religious volunteering	9.5%	–	20.7%	338
Pillarized	–	9.3%	20.0%	335
Odds ratio	4.57	1.96	1.30	1381
Chi square (d.f.)	*** 36.0 (1)	** 9.9 (1)	** 7.8 (1)	

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; (\*) $p < 0.10$ .

religious organizations by their parents when they were 15 years of age, 9.5 per cent reported currently being active as a volunteer for a religious organization. This difference is highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 36.0$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < 0.000$ ). The odds ratio for the relation between parental and children's religious volunteering, i.e. 4.57, is quite high, indicating that there is indeed a strong transmission of volunteering for religious organizations from parents to children. Column 2 reveals a significant transmission of volunteering for pillarized associations ( $\chi^2 = 9.9$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < 0.002$ ). The odds ratio for this relationship is weaker (1.96), but still positive and significant. Column 3 shows that there is also a transmission of volunteering from religious and pillarized organizations to secular associations. Parents of volunteers for secular associations more often volunteered for religious ( $\chi^2 = 7.8$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < 0.005$ ; odds ratio: 1.35) and pillarized associations ( $\chi^2 = 7.8$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < 0.005$ ; odds ratio: 1.30). While the results in columns 1 and 2 could be explained as a by-product of the transmission of other things than volunteering, this is more difficult for the results in column 3 because the respondents are active for different types of organization than their parents.

### *Transmission of volunteering, or something else?*

Tables 2.1 to 2.3 report the results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis of volunteering types. In Table 2.1, the results of the comparison of religious volunteering versus no volunteering are given (the results of the other two comparisons are given in Tables 2.2 and 2.3). Model 1 shows a strong effect of parental religious volunteering, controlling for age and gender. There is no spillover from parental pillarized volunteering to religious volunteering activities by their children. Model 1 also shows that, compared to non-volunteers, religious volunteers have quite distinctive personality characteristics: they are less open to experience, less able to take the perspective of others, but more empathic and somewhat more extraverted. However, controlling for personality characteristics does not decrease the effects of parental religious volunteering.

Model 2 supports the indirect religious transmission model, showing that the effect of parental volunteering largely disappears controlling for parental religious involvement. Those who were brought up in a more intensely religious family are more likely to volunteer for church. Controlling for parental religious involvement, there are no significant effects of parental religious affiliation on religious volunteering. Model 3 shows that the effect of parental religious involvement is mediated entirely by own religious involvement and affiliation. Interestingly, the effects of three out of four personality characteristics that were significant predictors in model 1 were also mediated by religious affiliation and involvement. This indicates that religion attracts people with specific personality characteristics (i.e. those who are less open to experience, less able to take the perspective of others, and more empathically concerned). Model 4 shows that religious volunteering is not related to parental social status. Model 5 shows the expected positive effect of education, but an opposite effect of occupational status: religious volunteers

**Table 2.1** Multinomial logistic regression analysis of volunteering for religious association versus no volunteering (n = 1245)

	Model 1 Child personality	Model 2 Religion parents	Model 3 Own religion	Model 4 Status parents	Model 5 Own status
Age respondent	1.22	1.10	1.06	1.09	1.11
Female respondent	0.76	0.75	0.75	0.73	0.68
Parental religious volunteering	***6.01	(*)2.10	(*)2.29	(*)2.16	2.10
Parental pillarized volunteering	1.69	1.62	2.04	1.86	1.93
Agreeableness	0.97	0.93	0.98	0.98	0.98
Conscientiousness	1.19	1.18	1.07	1.11	1.09
Extraversion	(*)1.34	*1.43	*1.50	*1.55	*1.56
Neuroticism	0.99	1.12	1.19	1.17	1.14
Openness	**0.65	*0.71	0.78	0.75	0.74
Perspective taking	*0.72	*0.73	0.78	0.74	0.73
Empathy	**1.54	**1.58	1.32	1.32	1.33
Religious socialization		***3.42	1.00	0.92	0.85
No religious affiliation parents <sup>a</sup>		2.45	1.02	1.02	1.04
Reformed		1.05	1.58	1.39	1.52
Re-reformed		1.64	0.83	0.74	0.76
Other		2.38	0.49	0.45	0.62
No affiliation respondent <sup>a</sup>			**0.09	**0.09	**0.08
Reformed			0.63	0.69	0.68
Re-reformed			1.97	2.05	2.06
Other			2.27	2.54	2.45
Church attendance			***1.81	**1.89	**1.92
Status parents				1.10	1.05
Education					*1.54
Household income					0.91
Occupational status					(*)0.68
Chi square (d.f.)	***132.37 (33)	***184.63(48)	***260.53(63)	***266.51 (66)	***287.36 (75)
-2 Log like	2203	2107	2030	1938	1858

Notes: Entries are odds ratios for z-standardized variables: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; (\*) $p < 0.10$ .

<sup>a</sup>Reference category: Catholic.

tend to have a lower occupational status but a higher level of education than non-volunteers. In sum, the transmission of religious volunteering is a by-product of the transmission of religion. Once parental religion is controlled, there is no additional effect of parental volunteering on volunteering for religious organizations as predicted by social learning theory. Nor is there any spillover effect from parental pillarized volunteering to children's religious volunteering.

The analysis of pillarized volunteering in Table 2.2 indicates a positive effect of religious parental volunteering as well as a positive spillover effect of pillarized parental volunteering in model 1, controlling for personality characteristics. Compared to non-volunteers, volunteers for pillarized organizations are less neurotic and considerably more empathically concerned. The results in model 2, where parental religion is controlled, give some support for the indirect religious transmission model. The spillover effect of religious on pillarized volunteering declines when the intensity of parental religion is introduced. The effect of pillarized volunteering does not decline. Volunteers for pillarized organizations are more likely to be born into a Re-reformed than into a Catholic family. The intensity of religious socialization is not related to pillarized volunteering. Model 3 shows that own religious involvement is not related to pillarized volunteering. The effect of parental volunteering for pillarized organizations remains

**Table 2.2** Multinomial logistic regression analysis of volunteering for pillarized association versus no volunteering (n = 1245)

	Model 1 Child personality	Model 2 Religion parents	Model 3 Own religion	Model 4 Status parents	Model 5 Own status
Age respondent	0.98	1.01	1.04	1.24	1.14
Female respondent	1.10	1.09	1.07	1.00	1.05
Parental religious volunteering	*1.53	1.41	1.42	1.07	0.95
Parental pillarized volunteering	*1.71	*1.86	*1.89	(*)1.70	1.52
Agreeableness	1.04	1.04	1.06	1.04	1.13
Conscientiousness	1.02	1.03	1.03	1.09	1.13
Extraversion	1.11	1.16	1.16	1.20	1.18
Neuroticism	(*)0.78	0.82	0.82	0.85	0.90
Openness	1.23	(*)1.26	(*)1.25	1.18	1.14
Perspective taking	0.92	0.93	0.93	0.92	0.85
Empathy	*1.41	*1.39	*1.35	(*)1.27	(*)1.34
Religious socialization		0.85	0.84	0.87	0.80
No religious affiliation parents <sup>a</sup>		0.72	0.64	.064	0.54
Reformed		0.66	0.53	0.51	0.44
Re-reformed		*2.24	(*)2.40	(*)2.34	(*)2.37
Other		1.24	0.70	0.68	0.89
No affiliation respondent <sup>a</sup>			1.14	1.37	1.38
Reformed			1.77	2.23	2.42
Re-reformed			0.64	0.80	0.84
Other			2.51	*3.78	3.28
Church attendance			0.98	0.96	0.99
Status parents				**1.44	1.20
Education					*1.37
Household income					0.93
Occupational status					(*)1.31

Notes: Entries are odds ratios for z-standardized variables: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; (\*) $p < 0.10$ .

<sup>a</sup>Reference category: Catholic.

significantly positive. In model 4, parental social status reflects a highly significant and positive effect on pillarized volunteering. In this model, the effect of parental pillarized volunteering declines, and the effect of parental religious volunteering disappears completely. In model 5, the effect of parental pillarized volunteering declines further, due to the introduction of occupational status and level of education. Both of these variables show the expected positive relationship with pillarized volunteering. In sum, the transmission of pillarized volunteering is largely a by-product of the transmission of social status, and to a lesser extent the result of the transmission of religion.

The analysis of secular volunteering in Table 2.3 shows positive effects of pillarized as well as religious volunteering in model 1, controlling for the positive relationship with age. Women less often volunteer for secular organizations than men. None of the personality characteristics is significantly related to secular volunteering. Model 2 shows that volunteers for secular organizations more often come from a Catholic family than from a Reformed or Re-reformed family. The intensity of parental religious involvement is not related to secular volunteering. Model 3 shows that own religious involvement and affiliation are not related to secular volunteering. Model 4 shows that parental social status is not related to secular volunteering, nor is own social status, as shown in model 5. Consequently, the effects of parental religious and pillarized volunteering remain significantly positive. Parental religious volunteering and pillarized

**Table 2.3** Multinomial logistic regression analysis of volunteering for secular associations versus no volunteering (n = 1245)

	Model 1 Child personality	Model 2 Religion parents	Model 3 Own religion	Model 4 Status parents	Model 5 Own status
Age respondent	***1.29	***1.32	***1.32	**1.29	*1.29
Female respondent	***0.49	***0.49	***0.49	***0.47	***0.49
Parental religious volunteering	**1.68	**1.97	***2.00	**1.93	**1.88
Parental pillarized volunteering	**1.62	**1.66	**1.70	**1.70	**1.69
Agreeableness	0.98	0.99	0.98	1.00	1.02
Conscientiousness	1.02	1.01	1.01	1.00	1.01
Extraversion	1.14	1.12	1.11	1.14	1.10
Neuroticism	0.91	0.94	0.93	0.93	0.94
Openness	1.13	1.12	1.13	1.12	1.09
Perspective taking	1.00	0.98	0.99	1.01	1.00
Empathy	0.99	1.00	1.01	1.00	1.02
Religious socialization		0.94	0.94	0.93	0.92
No religious affiliation parents <sup>a</sup>		0.63	0.70	0.68	0.64
Reformed		**0.46	*0.53	*0.44	**0.42
Re-reformed		*0.52	0.54	*0.40	*0.40
Other		0.52	0.84	0.59	0.68
No affiliation respondent <sup>a</sup>			0.82	0.86	0.85
Reformed			0.75	0.96	0.98
Re-reformed			1.11	1.43	1.41
Other			0.43	0.59	0.57
Church attendance			0.91	0.93	1.00
Status parents				0.97	0.90
Education					1.05
Household income					0.93
Occupational status					1.16

Notes: Entries are odds ratios for z-standardized variables: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; (\*) $p < 0.10$ .

<sup>a</sup>Reference category: Catholic.

volunteering spill over into secular volunteering in the next generation. These effects of parental volunteering cannot be explained as a by-product of the transmission of religion, social status or personality characteristics.

### **Approval or value internalization?**

The results in Table 2.3 show that parental volunteering, whether for religious or pillarized organizations, does have an additional effect on secular volunteering. Therefore, the question is justified whether the effect of parental volunteering is a true modelling one, or whether it is due to the immediate social influence of parents.

In Table 3, the two competing explanations are tested as explanations for the effects of parental volunteering by including an interaction of parental volunteering with an index measuring the distance between parents and children. Respondents who moved away, relinquished the religion in which they were brought up, or whose parents have died, are no longer directly affected by parental social influence. If the effect of parental volunteering also holds for this group of respondents, it can hardly be accounted for by a social approval explanation.

The results in Table 3 give some support for the social approval explanation for religious volunteering; however, the results for secular volunteering are consistent with a value internalization explanation. In the analysis of religious volunteering, the main effects of parental



**Table 3** Multinomial logistic regression analysis of volunteering including an interaction of parental volunteering with distance to parents (n = 1219)

	Religious	Pillarized	Secular
Parental religious volunteering	*3.67	0.56	*1.79
Parental pillarized volunteering	2.25	1.36	(*)1.57
Distance	*2.30	1.06	1.02
Parental religious volunteering * distance	*0.47	1.49	0.93
Parental pillarized volunteering * distance	1.06	1.15	1.09
Chi square	***301.95 (84)		
-2 Log like	1808		

Notes: Entries are odds ratios for z-standardized variables: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; (\*) $p < 0.10$ .

All variables included in the analysis reported in Table 2 were also included, but their effects have been omitted in this table. The complete table is available from the author.

religious volunteering and distance to parents are both significantly positive, while a significantly negative interaction appears between parental religious volunteering and distance. These results indicate that the transmission of religious volunteering weakens when the distance between parents and children increases. Distance to parents does not moderate the influence of parental volunteering on pillarized or secular volunteering. Although the spillover effect of parental religious volunteering into pillarized volunteering weakens to some extent, neither the main effect of the distance index nor the interactions of parental volunteering with distance are significant. These results indicate that parental volunteering for either religious or pillarized organizations both increase the likelihood of volunteering, even among those respondents who live beyond the direct social influence of their parents. For secular volunteering, the influence of parental volunteering seems to be an enduring modelling effect.

## Conclusions and discussion

This article provides evidence of an intergenerational transmission of volunteering which persists when religion and social status of parents and children and children's personality are controlled for. Indirect transmission models posit that the transmission of volunteering is a by-product of the transmission of religion, social status and personality characteristics. Results of multinomial logistic regression models support the indirect religious transmission model (hypothesis 4) for religious volunteering. Children of parents who volunteered for church are more likely to become engaged as volunteers in church as well, simply because they adopt the religious involvement of their parents, not because volunteering has an additional modelling effect. Omitting religion also biases the estimated relationship of parental religious volunteering with pillarized volunteering, but to a lesser extent.

The indirect status transmission model (hypothesis 3) is supported for pillarized volunteering. The effect of parental volunteering for pillarized organizations is due to the transmission of social status inherent in a higher level of education and a higher occupational status. While volunteers for religious, pillarized and secular voluntary associations had markedly different personalities, no support was found for an indirect personality transmission model (hypothesis 5). The fortunate implication of this result is that omitting personality characteristics does not bias the estimated intergenerational transmission of volunteering.

The approval hypothesis (hypothesis 1), which predicted that children imitate their parents to earn their approval, received no support in the analysis of secular volunteering. The effects of parental volunteering on secular volunteering persist beyond the direct social pressure of parents. Evidence for the conditioning of the influence of parental volunteering by social



approval was found for religious volunteering, however. The influence of parental volunteering was significantly stronger for respondents whose lives closely resembled those of their parents than for respondents who moved away to a different place of residence, relinquished the religion in which they were brought up and whose parents had died.

The prediction from social learning theory, namely that parental volunteering in one specific type of association spills over into volunteering for different types of organization (hypothesis 2), was supported for children's volunteering for secular organizations. Controlling for parental religion, social status and children's personality, an additional effect remains of parental volunteering on the secular volunteering activities of their children.

The results reported here are important for two reasons. First, they show that the influence of parental modelling reported in developmental psychology studies with children persists into adulthood, even when children have a life of their own, in a very different social context from the one in which they were brought up. Second, the results show that parental modelling not only affects the type of superficial helping behaviours that are usually studied in psychological experiments, but also examples of prosocial behaviour that require substantial investments of time.

Of course, this study also has its limitations. A prospective research design would have been better suited to testing the hypotheses from social learning theory. However, there is strong evidence suggesting that the retrospective reports of children about their parents' behaviours are highly reliable (De Vries and De Graaf, 2003). Given the high costs and other practical difficulties of longitudinal studies, relying on retrospective information is a good alternative. Other limitations of this study concern the measurement of social approval and civic identity. The data provide indicators of the distance to parents, but parents may not be the only significant others in the networks of respondents who approve of volunteering. Furthermore, civic identity was not measured directly. Future research on the intergenerational transmission of volunteering should include measurements of the civic identity that is supposedly passed on from parents to children by modelling. This civic identity should mediate the effects of parental volunteering. Future research should include the study of alternative pathways from parental volunteering to children's volunteering. Internalization of civic identity is but one potential explanation of the influence of parental volunteering. For instance, one could also imagine that parental volunteering affects children's volunteering because parents get their children into networks that mobilize volunteers (Mustillo et al., 2004).

Further research could investigate the value internalization hypothesis more thoroughly by looking at spillover effects. Experimental studies in developmental psychology suggest that the effects of parental modelling of one type of prosocial behaviour may generalize to other types of prosocial behaviour when children internalize prosocial values (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1994). This leads to the hypothesis that parental volunteering should also promote children's generosity towards charitable causes. This hypothesis deserves attention in future work.

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